

Naked Punch #4

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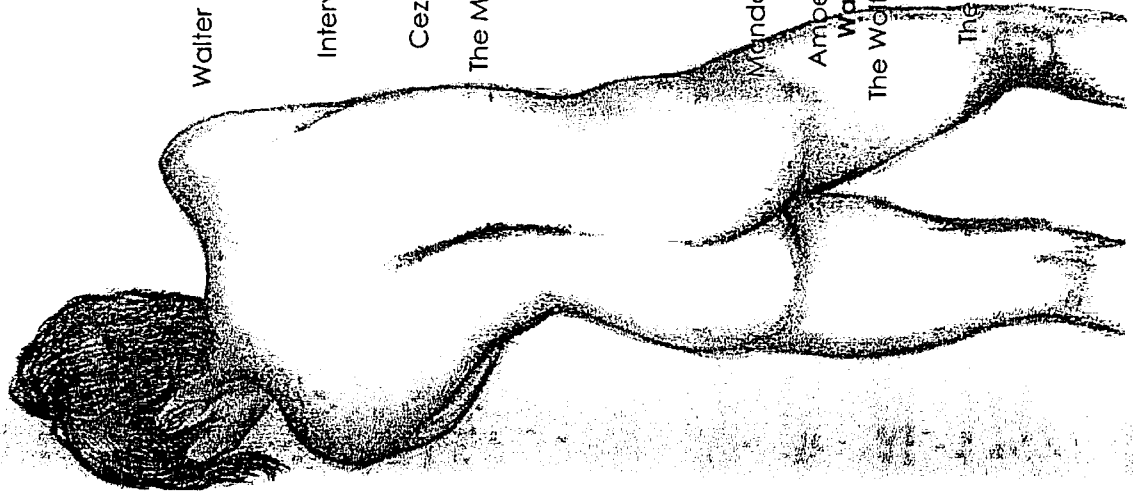
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Introduction to Issue #4



Naked Punch started life as a vehicle of intellectual hope; as a belief in the possibility of a field of open discourse, where disciplinary boundaries are no longer a bar to the reach of the young, original talent we seek to promote alongside the more established thinkers we feel have urgent messages to communicate. And in this, we hope, an antidote to the cynicism and mercantilism of contemporary political and intellectual life. This space was also conceived in a spirit of frustration. Whilst in the States and on the Continent, interdisciplinary work is taken to be the cornerstone of a humane education (if we are to allow ourselves a cute archaism), British universities - and their attendant publications - stubbornly hold on to the notion that disciplinary boundaries are, in themselves, the last bastions of 'rigour'. This frustration has however, we humbly suggest, been productive. And it has certainly galvanised the publication in its endeavour to present a worldwide perspective, as far as this may be possible.

The two main objections with which our project must meet are duly countenanced. We can envisage the resistance to the interdisciplinary impulse - the Anglo-American philosophical reluctance to accept 'theory', perhaps; and, no less, its cynical antipode, the supposition of the historical death of any debate surrounding this issue. To the first objection, we can only aim to persuade and to tentatively - humbly - educate. To the second, we can post you no posts. These questions remain. No one conversant with the contemporary vicissitudes of academic philosophical discussion can deny the urgency of such a project...if they are to accept the existence of such vicissitudes... perhaps we over-qualify. But whatever the debate surrounding this area of discourse, what Naked Punch seeks to do is to vitalise prospective intellectual conversations, to disregard academic boundaries (or, indeed, those who believe that they have extensively been broken down thus far), and move forwards into a sober space of enlivened dialogue.

Thus we offer you, the reader, a rich disassembly of articles, which are presented to you, the thinker, so as to create salient dialogues and open conversations. And then perhaps you will be inspired to contribute, which we urge you to do.

Richard Titlebaum's penetrating analysis of Walter Pater's historicism turns

around Kant to greet Critchley's creative, laughing, disappointment; and Trigg's object lesson in Cezanne whispers softly back to Pater's aesthetic search. On a more overtly political level, Bellow and Guttal's searing indictment of Wolfensohn calls out to Negri's wider analysis of American imperialism; whilst the problem of minorities in Indian democracy explored by Ambedkar gives urgent form and voice to the detracinated echoes of Negri's critique.

And so, further, into theory, which we do not resist: as Kyoo Lee reads Derrida and Foucault on Descartes' madman, she seems to reach out for a fireside chat with Goncalves' work on the Deridean body. Ansell Pearson's sparkling exposition of a neglected Nietzsche notebook gives historical and theoretical amplification to William's stark, inchoate, philosophical fiction. Showcasing new, fresh literary voices is central to this issue, even if they seek to mock the meat from which they feed. Secret and Qalandar share an attempt to communicate the impossibility of expression, shouting mutely in chorus. And lest we forget - in this privileged space - how lucky we are, the life and work of Alex Kosh reminds us all of the struggle for artistic freedom fought by so many before us. Soviet Realism may be but a foggy memory in our aesthetic annals, yet we are shocked back into urgent proximity through his angular protests and sensual rejoinders.

Two years on, we are still undecided as to whether to call this printed space a 'magazine' or a 'journal'; and we urge you to treat it directly as neither. A glossy lust for entertainment - even of an intellectual sort - will miss the point (nor are we Woody Allen. We do not seek to tease you with your hard-won sophistication). Conversely, a desire to be instructed and informed by a strictly expository journal would also be off the mark. Rather, simply read on, and share our enthusiasm for the possibilities opened up, the thoughts explored, and, hopefully, the conversations initiated by the following pages.

Glyn Salton-Cox



Federico Gallo—Mont

The Madness of Measuring Madness:
Revisiting Foucault vs. Derrida on Descartes's Madmen

Kyoo Lee



Touching, Parting, Poking... Preliminary Thoughts on The Life of
uncertainty

Touching is a twofold event: it renders stable the unstable, and vice versa. Plugging or hitting, both involve a contact. Part meets part. A usurped partner proposes a partnership. In every part of the world, parting, *partager*, is going on: imparting, departing, reparteing... A man parting his hair every morning is certainly not alien to us. Which way today? he may ask, dreaming of a different day to come — with some uncertainty. Surprisingly, that still is part of his world, of ours, bald ones included. Parting frames the life-world; articles in motion tickles the framed stasis.

Here, we have a thinker who became famous for, *inter alia*, poking fun at himself: René Descartes the author of *Meditations* (1641), who asked “me, mad?” Is he? We will never know for sure. For one thing, he never said he was not. Then, could he? That, too, remains to be seen. Compared to his contemporary, Michel de Montaigne also tortured by the reflexive force of *zoo-thinking* (Judovitz 1988: 8-38), Descartes is less verbose. He may not have had enough time to look at himself in the mirror, but evidently had time to look into himself; and that, daily, briefly. His evocative provocation of the realm of unthought, of that which remains to be thought, exemplifies a thought in vacation. The *Meditations* is a holiday diary, a scheduled reverie, as were, with six-day entries crafted well over six years (Rée 1987: 20; 7-20). It was initially drafted, so we are told, during a winter break in Germany (1619), which the author took between his mundane duties as a French Army officer longing to have some quality time with himself. Such an otherworldly, anti-social act of meditation, thus set apart, was still a part of his life, a part of *Philosophy* 101 reading list. Here we have a cocktail of “vocation and vacation” once dreamt up by Robert Frost, drunk nowadays by the overworked salaried thinkers.
Does the fun part still exist?

Descartes's madmen; I am more interested in seeing why, and in what sense, such men are common.

Part of course, the problem will persist: what is this madness, wanting to talk about the madness of measuring madness? What is this impulse? The immeasurable seems to be running deeper, deeper than its definition, the fever being not exactly the thermometer... the silence of ellipsis being not exactly

After all, Descartes speaks so little, and so briefly, about madness ...

— Michel Foucault, 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire'

This is how I will proceed. First, I briefly contextualise (§2) the debated passage from the *First Meditation* as a way of framing my argument which concentrates on the striking moment, punch, of hallucinatory madness, of the imaginary excess. In the second phase (§3), I juxtapose some of Foucault's and Derrida's key points of contention established in and exchanged through:

Madness and Civilisation? (Foucault 1961)

'Cogito and the History of Madness (Derrida 1967, hereafter *CH*), a 46 page writing on a 3 page margin' in Foucault's book

'My Body, This Paper and This Fire (Foucault 1971, hereafter *MT*), a point by point critique of Derrida's "Cartesian rationalism."

The purpose of this brief exercise, evaluative rather than exegetical, is to illustrate the radical differences and weaknesses of their respective theoretical orientations: historical or structuralist determinism (Foucault) and quasi-transcendental indeterminism (Derrida). Those problems, thus exposed, should remain instructive to anyone interested in thinking about madness philosophically or in any interdisciplinary manners. What you will see is, therefore, not a straightforward discounting of their anatomical achievements; quite the contrary. What I will be questioning, without simply dismissing their excessive preoccupation with, or implicit privileging of, the image of division or separation—the discursive practice of differences (Foucault) and ordinary *différance* different from itself (Derrida)—which seems to allow, rather systematically, a more fluid psychosomatic reading of the Cartesian experience of madness I wish to pursue further. My thoughts on difference still draw parasitically on their philosophical insights offered so fully, so exemplarily, through this academic pen-fight. The working hypothesis I shall be developing in what follows is, namely, that dividing is not

§2 A Cartesian Wave: The Ocean of Madness Inching Into the Land of Reason

I am going to explore the tactile potentiality of Cartesian cogitation, cognitive *agitation*: thinking as touching or being-in-touch; the irreducible, immeasurable dynamism of 'a touch of madness,' of the hyperbolic, without which Descartes's thought-experiment might not have taken place at all, or at least would have been much duller.

I am interested in the hyperbolic *moment*, touch, of madness — cryptically inscribed in the inaugural part of the first part of *Meditations* which reads, in many ways, like a surrealist novella. The kind of touch I am sensing here is the *de facto* coextensivity between the land and the ocean: the ocean, observes a poet, "kisses every inch of the land"; *every* inch indeed! And what better word to describe that water-tight intimacy than "kissing"? What I am pointing to is the inseparable tie between the "objective reality" and the narrative world of Descartes's reflective reveries doubling the real: an intratextual play, reciprocal convertibility, between the two, between the as-is and the as-if. His allegorical virtuosity, most lavishly displayed in the *Meditations*, is such that we often see wayward musings turning, at his Midas touch, into philosophical puzzles, and logic into rhetoric; the categorical con-fusion, transference, is immediately mutual, almost imperceptible. This line of thinking requires me to bracket off all the static images of Descartes the evil double of his evil genius, the Selfish Giant enclosing his Great Land of *Jimm*; so I shall just look instead into his actual text, the textuality of his being.

Specifically, I am interested in naturalising, or de-artificialising, the boundaries between reason and madness — madness, by which I mean a sudden flash, blow, of hallucination, the unstable imagination constantly slipping through, for not being quite "synthetic," the Kantian net of sensible understanding. My aim here is to make madness an indivisible part of reason and vice versa, rendering the two hyperlinkable; without strictly historicising or politicising the borderline the way Michel Foucault does, whose thematic fixation on the Cartesian *exclusion* of madness, as I will show, is rigidly ritualistic; or without vaguely transcendentalising or impersonalising it the way Jacques Derrida does, whose *inclusive* gesture, idly speculative. That borderline, ego-reflexively proscribed as such, is an oppressive fiction, better perceived, and treated, as a mobile marker of the transdifferential in action. The task here is to understand, I repeat, the "kissing" fluidity of mad conjectures, staged in the Cartesian theatre of hyper-reflection. So I am less interested in rehearsing the fascinating non-dialogue, gap, between Foucault and Derrida on the historico-political status and metaphysical subjectivity of

merely possessing/excluding or digressing/diverging but, more curiously and potently, *shoring* in both mechanical and ethico-political senses of the word. The theme of sharing—viz. appropriating, extracting, tracing, consuming, etc.—does feature in their works, although differently: Foucault's groundbreaking analyses of the economy, macro- or micro-, of power *distribution*, and Derrida's performative thematisation of the *dissimulation* of meaning, are obvious examples. I am not trying to ignore all of these, but merely to see whether and how the paths of the excluded, energetically appropriated in Foucault's work of revenge, and the logic of com-*pli*-caution, delicately staged by Derrida's work of mourning, can maintain their ties to the mythos, or ethos, of bio-topological thinking, which seem left unexplored in the debate, as if forgotten. The thought here is: something, something more lucid than "the borderline," is shared between reason and madness, between hypothesis and hyperbole, between hyperbole and hyperanxiety: a tide, fever, of hyper-reflexion? (§4)

Tear & Fear: from the start of the *Meditations*, those two seem to have gone missing. Seem, I say. For they remain invisible and silent, if not entirely absent. For meditation is an emotional event, too. Something happened before *Meditations*, something sensational that tore apart Young René's fully-formed subjectivity. What is that threat from which he recoils like a baked prawn? What is it that caused him to wrap himself up with the rationalistic trappings of "Cartesian" introspection? A shock:

Some years ago, I was *struck* (*animadverti, suis aperta*) by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood [...]. I realise that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last. But the task looked an enormous one, and I began to wait until [...] (The first two sentences of *Med.*, *emphasis added*).

"Struck" is an overtranslation but a faithful overreading. What it brings out, most acutely, is the virginal sense of surprise and danger, of stupefaction, impregnated in the host text, easily missed by a mere "notice," a merely correct translation of "*animadvertit*" or "*s'apercevoir que*." The force of striking reappears, as if in vengeance: dumbstruck, later Descartes decides to demolish everything for a change.

Such a dialectical movement of thought, which will shape the internal structure of the whole of *Meditations*, is vividly illustrated in the very first round of thinking, the four opening paragraphs (17-9/12-3) of the text, in

the last of which the madmen in question make a brief appearance:

the inaugural experience of dislocation: how shocking that was...
3rd: a recuperative will: I shall not be deceived!
the first attempt at restoring the cool: let me try to bracket off my sensations.

Although the senses occasionally deceive us with respect to objects which are very small or in the distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses — for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on. Again, how could it be denied that these hands or this whole body do not belong to me? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to madmen (*insani*), whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthenware, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass. But such people are insane (*sed amentes sunt isti*), and I would be thought no less extravagant (*deniens*), if I took anything from them as a model for myself. (*minor revision in trans.*)

And then? The madmen are suspended, i.e. introduced *and* left behind. As if "such people," supposedly out there, were inside the room, the I of "I would be thought no less extravagant" swiftly drifts into the dream stage: "But as if I were not a man who sleeps at night [...]." The "blackhole" (Kolakowski 1988: 68) of Cartesian cogitation, into which the I of "I shall not be deceived" gets sucked, will not leave the sceptic unmolested:

The result is that I begin to feel astounded (*obstupescam, tout étonné*), and this very feeling of stupor (*stupor, non étonnement*) itself only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. (19/13, *trans. revised*)

The last sentence of the 5th paragraph heralds yet another crisis of consciousness, the unfolding of the dreamer hypothesis: "Suppose, then, that I am dreaming [...]," with which the *First Meditation* (19-23/13-5) ends. The fact is: the first round (1st-4th Paragraphs) of the *First Meditation* is framed by colossal stupidity, beginning with the I *made* stupid, ending with *feeling* stupid. Similarly, the fictional dreamer (5th -) becomes awakened in a twofold manner: if what causes him to *become* alert is the transgressive force of otherworldly thoughts, what makes him *stay* alert, the reflexive recognition of that force. If the first kind is encounter, the second, recogni-

tion — “the interruption of mad-becoming,” as Gilles Deleuze puts it. Now, the sleep sequence kept at bay, let us focus on the madness followed by stupidity.

Look at that originary stupefaction, original *stultitia* (foolishness, silliness) of the cognitive subject: the hiccough, syncopated moment, of cogitation. Two missing links, put together, frames the first round of thinking: [Gap1] the moment of striking remaining invisible, accessed through rippled memories of the panic-attack; and then, the silence of madness, the subtle evasion of “I would be thought no less extravagant if [...] [Gap2] But as if I were not a man who does not sleep [...].” The first syncopation: merely struck, the I of I think remains oblivious of the stone that first hit him, the event; he remains “ontically” secured in his own offended consciousness. The whole of the *Meditations*, seen from the stone’s point of view, is a map of affects, drawn by recollection, traced by the textual representation of affected consciousness. But the map remains incomplete, for the second syncopation follows: the meditator’s disjunctive silence about madness, both literal and allegorical. The virtual departure, in the text, of the *Stultifera Navis*, is strangely elusive. Literally it is forgotten, yet allegorically, resonant. The first syncopation is a blow to the dormant mind, and the second, the blow of a whistle. The terror of error persists throughout, softened initially by memory, further stultified by irony. The intellect falsifies and fortifies. “Laughable”—the last paragraph of the *Six Meditations* points out, after all this show of schizo-paranoia—is that, terrorised reason:

I should not have any further fears about the falsity of what my senses tell me every day; indeed, the exaggerated doubts of the last few days should be dismissed as laughable. This applies especially to the principal reason for doubt, i.e. my inability to distinguish between being asleep and being awake. (89/61)

Note: madness is left out again, as if deliberately, as if that suspended sentence were an echo of the laughter of the madmen. Come to think of it, ordinary folks wouldn’t be “struck” by a queen mistaken for a king, either; but again, such a dementia, mini- or mega-, commonly uncommon, strikes us frequently, ubiquitously. Besides, anyone who holds that obsessive doubting, paranoia, can be a useful method wouldn’t be too normal; but again, lying isn’t uncommon. But,

Why should I bother? Stupidity is an emotional issue, too: a matter of affectivity.

My suggestion, in a word, is that the *Meditations* is a show: better read as an

allegory of stupidity, of madness. What I have been trying to show is that the sudden invasion and evasion of as-if, characteristic of al-legorical (saying-otherwise) mode of presentation, is the intellect’s way of relating to, masking, its scandalous predicament: lack of certainty, discovery of the essential void, irreducible to a mere mathematical fault. The paralogical “vapour” of as-if, bracketed as such, remains part of the *Meditations* like a powerful shadow, neglected yet ineradicable. Paradoxically enough, it is such an allegory of confusion, if not the confusion itself, that safeguards the infinite potency of Cartesian cogitation, which overflows the Kantian boundaries of the normative synthetic imagination. This “overflow” cannot be neatly channelled into the Romantic idiom of sublation or sublimation, Hegelian or otherwise, for, as Descartes, in the actual textuality of his being, of his life, the line between epistemic madness and sound judgement, between frivolity and gravity, which here is, remains excruciatingly, exquisitely thin (cf. Broughton 2002: 90-2). This renders his authorial ethos biungly, healthily anti-Romantic, by comparison to, say, that of his Teutonic offshoots. Indeed, is not the “insulated” septic a construction of the modern philosophical imagination dating from the eighteenth century, deriving mainly from Kant? (2002: 91, Myles Burn-keartpartly cited)

Let me summarise the key contention of this essay established so far. First, the Cartesian hyperbole induces, secures and reinforces mental agility, the mind’s capacity to agitate, freshly and fully explored in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649) published a year before Descartes’s predicted death — he was very ill. It is an artful, pragmatic use of the figure of the outside, of the improper; pragmatic not reductive, for the tacile elasticity of multi-faceted cogitation pluralizes any authorial “aim” or “intent.” Second, what enables such a figural appropriation of the inadequate, as exemplified by Descartes’s use of the figure of the madmen, is an unprecedented sensorial contact remembered as such — a shock, I said, of “it is as if the world had been a global deception all along,” followed by the second, “as if I were a mad man,” which is derivative from the initial philosophical trauma translated into subjective terms. The real blow of cogitation is, then, hidden in those [Gaps], that mobile vacuum later filled with the laughter, a tragi-comic fear, of the invisible already felt. The story of the stupid may not be true; but the feeling

of Foucault vs. Derrida: The Act of Force vs. The Vertiginous Thrill of Stactitude

Do they approach this void? this fearful asymmetry? — if so, how? if not,

why not?

Do Foucault and Derrida approach this void? Yes and No. Let me begin by pointing to fear, first, as I did earlier. A wise man in Derek Jarman's film, *Wittgenstein* (1993), says: "Where two principles meet, which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each calls the other a fool or a heretic. If people did not sometimes do silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done." Replace "fool or heretic" with "Cartesian" (CH 59-60/36-7; MT 599/412). You get the picture. The Foucault-Derrida debate seems to be motivated by their mutual fears of being branded—rationalistic, self-assured, reactionary, good old—Cartesian.

This dread is far from private. Consider the highly institutional and adversarial context (cf. Melehy 1997: 37-43) in which the French master and the French-speaking disciple, both known for their informed, sophisticated attacks on modern rationalism, problematise the status of the French institution "des Cartes" whom they ought to know by heart. Derrida's prefatorial dramatisation, internal to his strategy, of the interminable unhappiness of the academic subject acknowledging the interminable debt felt toward the leading master whose mirror he cannot yet "must break" (CH 52/32), shows quite realistically the powerful aporia of thinking against the grain of tradition which, as he notes resoundingly, may be, after all, absent — or, if so, may have to be *invented* as such, to use Robert Bernasconi's (1995) word mobilising his perceptive critique of Martin Heidegger's retroactive demarcation of "The West." True, the layered depths and paranoia-inducing density of "the Cartesian web (Melehy 1997)" of cogitation remain, for many post-Cartesians, an obstacle through which they must work out their positions. I must say, however, with all due respect to M. des Cartes, that both Foucault and Derrida over-respect the authority of the Cartesian I, which they seem to have invented in the first place, in their own ways, in the name of the Father — of modern philosophy of the rational self: in the form, in Foucault's case, of the crushing presence of controlling reason; and in Derrida's, of the despairing absence of pure logos. My Descartes, by contrast, it should be clear by now, is fairly stupid and hospitable, hospitalisable even. And that is what I respect, if nothing else.

Problematic, I find, both in the debate and most of the subsequent commentaries, whether neutralised (e.g. Amico 1984; Ferry 1990) or positioned (e.g. Boyne 1990; Melehy 1997), is the metaphysical blindness to the banality, everydayness, of hallucinatory madness. The glorified blindness is a price paid for the artificial, repressive doubling of the arbitrarily empowered boundaries between Madness and Reason. I am not trivialising engineering

Reason's "coup de force (MT 585ff/396ff)" disclosed by Foucault's sobering analysis of its self-instituting violence. Nor am I discounting the reflective subtlety with which Derrida discerns, systematises and thereby salvages within Reason, the "originary, strange complicity (CH 96-7/62-3)" between madness and historical reason, "madder than madness" in virtue of being the well-spring of sense, however silent or murmuring. What I am questioning is the rhetoric of the Other, of the inadequate scale, structuring both arguments: both of them, in Foucault's own words used against Derrida, disclose (*exfermet*) the alienated madness outside (*à l'extérieur d'elle*) philosophical discourse" (598/411-2). This, one may argue further, is an instance of philosophical Romanticism turned back upon itself. In Descartes's silence on madness, Foucault reads a threat, an execution, a differentiation in action; Derrida, a double gesture of exclusion-inclusion, the auto-eroticism of originary *différance* "narrating itself" (88/57-8); and I, additionally, a sudden blink of the puzzled, a sharable laughter.

The end-game structure into which both Foucault's archaeological and Derrida's transcendental arguments become locked, thereby producing the inner comedy of the madness of measuring madness, is illustrated by their polemically aggressive use of Cartesian uncertainty. D accuses F of acting "as if he knew what madness means" (CH 66/41); F's thesis that the Classical Age forges its exclusive identity through a sudden, arbitrary, metaphorical equation between leprosy and madness (SN) is itself an example. F, read this way, is either hypocritical or naive: *Madness and Civilisation, a de jure archaeology of madness, is a de facto history, evidence of the author's own taxonomic, structuralist ambition: the archival drive of Foucault's project is either silencing pure madness further, or simply doubling the lack of irony. Now, F, in return, interrogates D who "transcribes his feeling (of fear, MT 584/395) into his text, at the very moment at which he attempts to master madness" (602/410). D acts "as if he knew what logos means" in the broadest, most inclusive sense; reflexively reinforced by such a powerful ignorance, he "systematically" (602/416) disregards, or obscures, different and concrete senses—juridical, clinical, metaphysical (591/403)—of madness operative in the text, the dynamic co-operation of which turns the madness passage, conclusively in fact, into a qualifying exam: "I remain qualified to think, and therefore I make my resolution (591/403ff)." The madmen here are, then, not merely pedagogically but politically. F's point is: (a) the madmen simply fail to join the world of doubting subjects; (b) D, blinded by his own idealism, fails to see that point, that insidious politics of examination and confinement — D is already installed as, and speaking as, an insider of*

that "system (602/416)." D, read this way, resembles the psychiatric doctor F. Leuret whom F (1997) introduces as an example of clinical thrill of measurement.

The insights of each reading acknowledged, the problem I must still point to is: both Foucault and Derrida absolutise Descartes (his text) *as if* he (it) knew what he (it) is doing – "he," in the case of Foucault the thinker of subject-formation, of institutionalised discourse; and "it," for Derrida the thinker of textual traces, of originary hauntology. Too busy ironising each other into a closeted Cartesian, neither of them allow a room for self-irony the host text in question itself displays. The Cartesian touch of, or on, madness, I emphasise, is too lightweight to represent the territorial voice of reason (F); too aberrant to be folded into a "methodological" system of self-doubt as "a case" of thought (D).

But of course, my naturalising, narrativised reading of Descartes is only a case. And I am presenting it as a hybrid variation on the two, now-canonical readings: the contracted body in fear, which Foucault exposes beautifully, I have been seeking to restage; a textual sensitivity accompanying my close reading of Descartes, I will not declare mine. My argument thus modified and generalised, put in the words of Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen (1988), is that "Beyond the fact that insane thought—which knows neither reality nor negation, nor doubt, nor degree of certitude—is thought nonetheless,

the fact remains that all these irreconcilable representations are indeed referred to a single subject, and that they coexist within a single subject. At its most naive, the question "who?" directs questioning toward birth, toward a "beyond" of identity. To say *what* I am is relatively easy. But to say *who* I am—who thinks, who wishes, who fantasises in me—is no longer in my power. That question draws me immediately beyond myself, beyond my presentations, toward a point—the "point of otherness"—where I am another, the other who gives me my identity, that umbilical cord. (5-9, abridged)

"What then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions" (2nd Med, 28/19) – this is indeed relatively easy. The point of otherness in me relates, rather, to that which *remains* true, whatever the case, i.e. "the fact that I exist" (28/19), whether as a sad man or as an insane woman. The point, of otherness, is: the umbilical cord exists; *ergo*, it can be cut. I am, have been, alive; *ergo*, I feel death inching into me. Life precedes death even when, or rather because, death overwrites life. Here is, then, a thought on and of Cartesian madness taken as a case of the death,

of subjectivity. Sometimes I am mad, hopefully, sometimes not. Reality part of me: madness, dream and death, as if real, touch me. That's "what my senses tell me every day" (89/61).

2. A Tide of Reflexology: The Ship Goes On Sailing.

What else remains to be told?

Quite remarkably, even the insane (*les insensés*), the *Discourse of Life, Method* observes, seem to possess language. For they are capable of arranging various words together and forming an utterance from them in order to make their thoughts understood" (AT VI 57/CSM I 140, *trans. revised*). What I have been trying to make you understand is the following point: madness is part of reason, and vice versa; what remains stupid is our inability to distinguish between the two. Our obsession, fascination, with the madman, if nothing else, explains that. The touch of madness (§1) comes in the form of a wave (§2), a kissing interaction between as-is and as-if, between the said and the unsaid; reason's acts, whether of force or measuring, come only after – the fact (§3). And the fact let me emphasise again, madness *flows* into the realm of reason before the power of reason gets distributed, before its meanings disseminated. The madness, of which Descartes speaks and does not speak, is not merely kept bay the way Foucault sees it. Nor is it neatly inserted into an obscure unity, "pure logos undifferentiated from madness," which Derrida designates, elevates, as the origin—rigorous *semen*—of historical reason. The point to note is the weaving interpenetration of Madness and Reason; hence, the figure of the wave, not of the wall or wallet, as a fitting metaphor for the inseparability at issue.

Stated differently, Cartesian thought is reflexological before being reflexive. It is agitated, shaped by a ticklish touch, an instantaneous *partager*, of the thin line between thought and unthought: between ratio and hyperbole the immeasurable curvature of thought in action; between a thesis and a hypothesis the persistent adherence to which can, surely, cost a life. Descartes's sceptical aggression is, on the one hand, the clinical rationalism of Doubting

Foucault—Katia Fiorentino



Thomas turned inward, an image we are now over-familiar with. The human lust for self-assurance finds a solution in the ego-reflexive subjugation of the poked under the poking/poker: "this body near the fire," "this hand holding this paper," these ten fingers groping around the keyboards, these two dry eyeballs, all these, after all, belong to me, "a thinking thing," do they not? But beware, poking is, on the other hand, a reminder of the outside: the madmen are out there, who are perhaps already inside me. Note the tactual coextensivity, interaction, between those "two hands," acknowledgedly Derridian in its tropo-physiological origin. Such a mutual molestation, rubbing, between reflexive reason and visceral reflex (a contraction from the unknown, the unexpected) will continue to take place, as long as there remains a body to be touched, a body of knowledge included.

The Cartesian "clarity" of thinking is, then, an after-effect; and the Cartesian act of introspection, a trap, that is, discriminating reason's act of "self-entrapment" (Kofman 1991) — often ridiculed by *les enfants postmoderns* who are often no less self-reflexive. The thinking animal is no less reflexive than, say, a field mouse, insofar as both wince in the face of a threat; this view pursued, differences between phenomenological reflexivity and a reflex action, which there are, would be more normative or nominal than originary. How does speculative philosophy deal with its anxiety disorders, with its "other" that overwhelms it? Reflexive rationality seems to hold the key. A curious example, apart from the obvious, is the "subjective experience of the sublime" that Immanuel Kant the rationalist seeks to measure in *the Critique of the Power of Judgement* (§23-9), with some ironic exactitude: true, is it not, facing the "absolutely large," we step back and see how far we should stand apart from it (§25-7, mathematical); facing "a power superior to great obstacles," we step back and reflect on our fears aroused from within (§28-9, dynamical).

To apply this scheme to our case: the psychic distance thus secured is measurable, in the first instance, by the ruler that the "mad" scientists carry around in their pockets like a mobile god; in the second, by our collective reflex from a mad wo/man in the street, that aberrant—unnatural/supernatural—thing to stay away from. In both instances, a threat rules — before the ruler does. The blow comes first; the retreat, stepping back, of consciousness is a recuperative acknowledgement of defeat, performed by the subject, cognitive or emotive. The dialectics of knowledge, a desire or disgust, is the maddening force of metric thinking turned inward, a vital strategic need to make sense of this real hallucination called a human life. This need exists, if nothing else.

am not trying to reduce a beautiful act to a bestial need. I am recasting the altered, negatively sublimated, postmodern condition of philosophical thinking into a versatile tool, pluralising it into transdifferential connections and of the meditative mind. What I am, and have been, trying to explore is a way of shortening that Kantian distance into a point of contact; a way of inhabiting the borderline between discursive reason and aesthetic experience; a way of feeling, tracing and restaging that mental vibration more lucid than hallucination. This line of pursuit is not alien to that proto-Aristotelian sense of wonder with which, let us recall, philosophy begins: it begins with and after a fact — a fact that remains more than factual.

Wendrich Nietzsche, for example, the enduring aporia inaugurating the "post-modern" history of philosophy, so funny and not so funny, turns to M. Descartes, and queries: "My dear sir, it is improbable you are not mistaken. But why do you want the truth at all?" (1973: 46, article 16)

Yes: why?

I don't know, one must (*il faut*) believe ...

Tears that see ... Do you believe? (*Vous croyez*) (Derrida 1990: 130/129,⁶ trans. revised)

May I do you feel the tears tickling my face?

Josée Graham, a work-in-progress poem, *Lyric Confinement*, Univ. of London, Nov. 2001 (first two chapters, 'Sulitifera Navis' (hereafter SN) and 'The Great Confinement'

pages 36-9, introductory part of Ch 2, 'The Great Confinement', edited out in the translation.

Appendix to 2nd edition of *Histoire de la folie (Madness and Civilization)*

"Literary" approaches to this issue, focusing on the reciprocal relationship between the act of writing and madness identified as, re-enacted by, the body of "I" that inscribes itself (Uelman 1985; Butler 2001: 263ff) seem close to mine for their de-abstracting impulses.

Q & A order reversed

Abbreviations For the Key Texts

[V] (CSM) Descartes, René. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Ed. Ch. Adam and P. Tannery. Revised Edition. Paris: CNRS, 1964-76 / Trans. Cottingham, John et al. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vols. 1 - III. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[U] References to *Méditations* appear with Page Numbers Only

[E] *Cogito et Histoire de la Folie* in *L'écriture et la différence*. Collection Tel Quel. Paris: Seuil, 1967. Repr. Chicago Points. Paris: Seuil, 1979 / Trans. Cogito and the History of Madness' in Trans. Alan Bass. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1987.

[M] 'Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu' in appendix to 2nd edition. Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la folie*, Paris: Seuil, 1971 / Trans. 'My Body, This Paper and This Fire' in *Aesthetics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol.2. Ed. James D. Faubion. London: Penguin Books, 2000.

[SN] 'Sulitifera Navis' in Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*. The History of Insanity in the Age of Reason. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Tavistock Publication, 1967.

list of references please visit www.makdepunch.com